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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: ALMATY NOTES, NOVEMBER 10 - NOVEMBER 21, 2008

¶1. (U) NOTE: The "Almaty Notes" series is intended to maintain focus on developments in civil society, the media, and the opposition in Kazakhstan's "southern capital" following the move of the Embassy to Astana. END NOTE.

NUR OTAN REACHES OUT TO NGOS

¶2. (U) On November 12, the new deputy chairman of the presidential Nur Otan party, Darkhan Kaletayev, met with NGO Shanyrak President Asylbek Kozhakhmetov. Kozhakhmetov told Kaletayev about Shanyrak's work with internal immigrants who come to Almaty from other parts of the country and frequently face housing and social issues. The two agreed to maintain contact and to cooperate in solving housing and internal migration problems in Almaty. At a separate meeting of the AytPARK discussion club, Kaletayev expressed Nur Otan's readiness to cooperate on these issues with opposition parties. In January, President Nazarbayev specifically called on the Nur Otan leadership to increase dialogue with NGOs and opposition political parties.

GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES CIVIL SOCIETY PROGRAM

¶3. (U) At a November 19 meeting, members of Parliament's Public Council, which includes representatives of NGOs and state agencies, discussed the so-called "Concept on Civic Society Development". According to the Vice Minister of Culture and Information, the government has allocated 709 million tenge (\$5.9 million) for NGO grants this year and plans to increase the allocation to 721 million tenge (\$6.0 million) next year. NGO representative pointed out several problems with the program and alleged that only 2,000 of the 10,000 registered NGOs are active, while the rest were created solely to receive government grants.

COURTS WARN RETIRED OFFICER ABOUT UNSANCTIONED RALLY

¶4. (U) On November 20, the Almaty Mezhrayonniy Economic Court issued a warning to the leader of the "BOMZh" (Vagrant) retired army servicemen union, Daulet Zhumanbekov, for organizing an unsanctioned rally. Union activists picketed the city garrison office on November 18 to demand apartments in Almaty for retired military officers. Under Kazakhstani legislation, retired officers with 25 years of service are entitled to free apartments. Several officers won a suit against the Ministry of Defense (MOD) for its failure to fulfill this obligation. To date, the MOD has been unable to adhere to the court ruling and provide the officers with apartments in Almaty.

FOREIGN LABORERS A SECURITY THREAT TO ALMATY

15. (U) Foreign migrant laborers down on their luck pose a real threat to Almaty, according to Almaty city officials. During a November 10 meeting of city administration, Almaty's Chief of Police Yerlan Turgumbayev maintained that more than half of the crimes in Almaty were committed by immigrants and migrant laborers from other Central Asian countries. Many of these foreign workers are not paid wages due and so cannot return to their homes. The Almaty city administration decided to set up a working group to research the city's migration problems and to prepare recommendations for the government on amendments to the Law on Migration.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST ILLEGAL HOMES CONTINUES

16. (U) The Almaty City administration continued its campaign to demolish illegally-built houses. Eighteen administrative cases have been launched against owners of illegal dwellings built in the newly-redistricted district of Alatau. The Administrative Court has already ruled to demolish 53 illegal houses in the district and will review 27 similar cases in the near future. (Argumenty I Fauty, November 11)

MORTGAGE CRISIS AFFECTS RESIDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

17. (U) According to the Almaty Psychiatric Center, more than 1,000 Almaty residents who have sought the Center's help over the past three months named the mortgage crisis as the primary reason for their mental and emotional problems.

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